

AD HOC Parent Support Advisory Group

June, 2006

Charge: Provide recommendations to the Early Learning Council regarding the state's role and investment in parent support/parent education.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ad Hoc Parent Support Advisory Group, chaired by Early Learning Council member Kip Tokuda, staffed by United Way of King County, and comprised of early childhood professionals from across the state, convened three times in May-June, 2006. The group's intent was to define parent support, and to make recommendations to the Early Learning Council and the Department of Early Learning about what the state's role and investment in this area can and should be. Understanding the strong link between support for parents and the school readiness and ultimate school success of their children, and aware of the legislative mandate for both the Early Learning Council and the new Department of Early Learning that states the importance of parents as their children's first teachers and defines early learning as including "parental education and support," the group recognizes that:

- Support for the formal child care system alone will not ensure that all Washington children are ready to succeed in school.
- Children who are not ready for school come from formal and informal child care settings, as well as from exclusively parental care, and the success of all of them will be part of determining the state's education results.
- The large number of children not prepared for kindergarten indicates that this issue reaches beyond populations traditionally identified as 'at risk;' assessments of school readiness support this as well.
- *All* parents need support while raising their children. At any point in a parent's or child's life that parent or child can become vulnerable.
- Although the school readiness gap extends broadly throughout the population, low-income children and children of color are disproportionately represented in 'at risk' categories, and their parents are especially in need of support.
- Parents need a continuum of support, with the ability to access varying types, levels and intensity of services and resources based on changing needs.
- The state has a critical role to play in supporting its children by ensuring opportunities are available for their parents to get the help they need. Support services should be accessible and relevant to all, but remain voluntary unless mandated as part of a justice or child protective system requirement.

In addition to a set of foundational resources that parents need (housing and economic stability, affordable basic physical and mental health care, adequate time for developing and maintaining quality relationships) the group identified five types of support resources to which all parents should have access:

1. Individualized/personal support,
2. Informal research and self-education,
3. Group/personal support,
4. Formalized education, and
5. Information, referral and advice.

Preliminary Recommendations for State Involvement

- A. Institutionalize Parent Support as Necessary for Early Learning
 - 1. Develop and form a permanent Parent Support Advisory Committee
 - 2. Fund and expand effective current programs
- B. Better Understand Parent Support Needs & Tie to Child Outcomes
 - 1. Support a deeper statewide assessment of what parents need, helping to refine priorities
 - 2. Support assessment and evaluation of services and effectiveness of delivery models to ensure cultural competence, accessibility and their relationship to child outcomes
 - 3. Assess and remove barriers to and gaps in programs (transportation, cost, availability, linguistic accessibility, etc.)
 - 4. Institutionalize parent support programming as a research and development function at the state, linking to other processes looking at R & D and child outcome feedback mechanisms
 - 5. Strengthen infrastructure assuring equal access and a variety of entry points to local services
- C. Drive Innovation and Leverage Support
 - 1. Encourage private sector support of parents through business tax incentives
 - 2. Promote innovative, evidence-based programs through funding and other incentives

Next Steps for Parent Support Work

The advisory group requests that the Early Learning Council formalize this or another group as a Technical Advisory Committee to its work in order to develop specific policy recommendations and priorities related to parent support and to guide the necessary financing research work on those recommendations.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Early Learning Council's legislative mandate includes recognition that parents are their children's first teachers, and focuses on improving accessibility to early learning programs. The legislation establishing the new Department of Early Learning also recognizes the importance of parents as their children's first teachers, and defines early learning as follows: "Early learning" includes but is not limited to programs and services for child care; state, federal, private, and nonprofit preschool; child care subsidies; child care resource and referral; *parental education and support*; and training and professional development for early learning profession." (Emphasis added). By law, the new department's direct duties also include "improving parent education and support."

Parent support is therefore clearly defined as a part of early learning and is critical to our success.

The Ad Hoc Parent Support Advisory Group¹, chaired by Kip Tokuda, member of the Early Learning Council, and staffed by United Way of King County, convened three times in May and June, 2006, with the intent to identify a broad range of strategies, services, and resources that fall under the heading of parent support, and to make recommendations to the Early Learning Council and the

¹ See participant list, attached.

Department of Early Learning about what the state's role and investment in this area can and should be. The Ad Hoc Parent Support Advisory Group recognizes that:

- **Parents are their children's first teachers**
- **All parents are in need of support for raising their children and at any point in a parent's or child's life that parent or child can potentially become 'at risk'**
- **Studies of school readiness demonstrate that a significant percentage of children who are not ready are not from families that would traditionally be recognized as 'at risk,'**
- **Children who are not ready for school may or may not be in formal or informal childcare and yet their success will be a determining factor in our state's success in education**
- **A significant percentage of low-income children and children of color are disproportionately represented in 'at risk' categories and their parents must especially be provided with support**
- **Parent voices and private sector interests are important and should be sought out in the dialogue.**

Our discussion focused on the range of supports that all parents should have access to and identified 5 "pillars of support" as a way to categorize the types of support that parents could use.

These five pillars are:

- 1) Individualized/personal support,**
- 2) Informal research and self-education,**
- 3) Group/personal support,**
- 4) Formalized education, and**
- 5) Information, referral and advice.**

We also noted that basic foundations, such as affordable access to basic physical and mental health services, housing and economic stability, and adequate time for developing and maintaining quality relationships, are important underpinnings – and, when present, can decrease stress and increase a parent's likelihood of success. **The group recognizes that parents are a child's first teachers, that participation in parent support activities is purely voluntary, and that the state has a role to play in offering – but not mandating services—unless there is a requirement through the judicial system** to participate in certain therapeutic and educational services as a way to prevent future abuse or neglect. However, the group also recognizes that in some cases, even where a family is required by court order to attend family support activities, the basic essential services are currently not immediately available or accessible. We must be able to meet parents, whether their children are in early child care programs or not, where they are and when they need support.

In the short term, the group has preliminary recommendations for the Early Learning Council on:

- 1. Institutionalizing parent support as necessary for early learning**
- 2. Better understanding of parent support needs and tying to child outcomes**
- 3. Driving innovation and leveraging support**
- 4. On-going work on parent support.**

The group also identified possible questions/issues that the Early Learning Council may wish to consider after the interim report to Washington Learns is presented and made recommendations regarding continuing the discussion on the role of parent support in ensuring school readiness for all children.

II. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS.

Because it is recommended that the work of both this group and the ELC's focus on parent support be significantly enhanced between June 28 and November, and that a dialogue occur with both the new Department and parents about funding and policy priorities, these findings are preliminary, particularly as they were developed by the ad hoc advisory group during a period of less than a month's time.

Definition of "Parent"

For purposes of this work we have considered the needs of parents of children prenatal to 12 years old. Parents include all people who provide for the *primary care needs* of children – e.g., who play the parenting role in a child's life. These parents, who include grandparents, stepparents, foster parents, adoptive parents and guardians, have responsibility for ensuring that children are clothed, fed, and that their basic needs, including social-emotional needs, are met.

Underlying Assumptions about Services and Support to Parents and Families

We believe that services and resources supporting parents should be:

- Culturally competent and linguistically accessible.
- Community-based and available statewide.
- Based on what parents want and need.
- Grounded in "family support" principles.
- Fully or partially state funded as necessary and appropriate.
- Incentivized for private sector involvement.

These assumptions underlie what is suggested for each of the pillars of support for successful parenting. For our purposes, the objective of parent support activities is that the child does well in school and in life, ultimately, but indicators for success of these supports would likely be around parents' knowledge, skills, behaviors, sense of self-competence/confidence, etc.

State's Role

The participants worked to identify what the state government's role should be in supporting parents. It was acknowledged that the state does provide funding and support to parents in ways that parents and the general public may not directly attribute to the state, e.g., funding to health care institutions that may support a parent's mental or physical health, program or service delivery funding in the form of grants or provider reimbursements, funding formal educational institutions that offer parent support such as parenting classes. It was determined that there could be four broad categories in which the state could take a role in parent support. Those areas include taking philosophical positions on issues, having a direct function (e.g., operating programs and offering services), providing funding and developing funding strategies to others for service delivery, and promoting parent support by creating policy/fiscal incentives. Participants identified and prioritized strategies for each category, but for service provision did not discuss universal versus targeted support or access.

Pillars of Parent Support

Our diagram in Appendix A illustrates the types of elements that should be present in parents' lives in order to increase their capacity to ensure that their child is fully ready for school and life. These supports are universally important for all parents, whether the child is in childcare or not, and we recognize that a range of service intensity or support strategies is necessary to meet the specific needs of families.

Our diagram illustrates five pillars of support and we suggest that parents should have access to support in *each* of the broad areas: **1) individualized/personal support, 2) informal research and self-education, 3) group/personal support, 4) formalized education, and 5) information, referral and advice.** As noted above, we recognize that there are core services and supports that all children and families need in order to be able to achieve successful parenting; these are represented at the base of the diagram. Not all areas of support for parents need necessarily be provided or funded by the state; however, the state should play a key role where that support would otherwise not occur or where there is a statewide infrastructure need.

III. OVERARCHING PRELIMINARY THEMES & CONCLUSIONS

The group recognized that some issues are statewide in nature. Others are philosophical and attitudinal in scope. The overarching conclusions would impact all parents and make an impact with the public in general. Other conclusions relate to state funding and state policies promoting opportunities to support parents.

Overarching Conclusions

- **Parent support is not yet a recognized, defined component of the early learning dialogue or the new Early Learning Department's role.** Parent support is inclusive of, but not limited to, parent involvement in their child's formal education (for zero to 6, some children will not be in any form of outside-the-home childcare or away from parents). A clear working definition of what we mean by supporting parents is not yet incorporated into the Early Learning Council's work, nor in Thrive-by-Five, and other leaders' work in this area.

- **Services are not always linguistically accessible for cultures represented in each community and are inconsistent across the state.** Availability of credentialed bilingual and bicultural staff in programs that serve parents of different cultures is limited.
- **Seeking support may be seen as a sign of weakness.** There is no universal public awareness campaign that would build universal affirmation of the need for support; it may be necessary for a paradigm shift to normalize need for this support. Parents may feel that they should “have it together” without needing support, yet our society has changed dramatically.
- **Community based experiences could be expanded to practice parenting,** communities could foster more opportunities for healthy parent-child interactions, perhaps through cultural and civic events.
- **Barriers to existing services are present,** such as cost, transportation, times that services are offered, and wait lists, making it challenging for parents to get support when they need it and want it, even in court-mandated situations.
- **Quality and availability of formal support** (whether individual and personalized, group or formalized education) **varies across the state** and there could be strengthened assessment and evaluation of parent support programs with broader application.
- **Without state involvement, some things won’t happen** (e.g., a comprehensive way, consolidated statewide, for parents to access locally-available resources; full funding of programs for court-ordered treatment).
- **Parent support is not part of the state’s research and development function** that tracks to the well-being of children.
- **Formalized collection of data on ‘what parents need’,** from a Parents’ Advisory Group or other mechanism **does not exist.**
- **The state is currently doing good things and we could build on them** – we could do more to recognize the current tools that exist.

Funding (distribution of state funds to programs or the development of funding strategies):

- **Without enhanced state funding, gaps will not be addressed.** Some types of support within the pillars require consistent resources and likely wouldn’t happen without state coordination, and/or funding such as some types of individualized and personal support (e.g., home visiting), formalized education (e.g., quality and statewide availability) and infrastructure development (e.g., a statewide method to enter into formalized support).

- **Resources are not adequate at the local level.²** There are inadequate and inconsistent private and local resources to individual communities to develop capacity for parent support to address all pillars and demonstrate outcomes (home visits, parent education, other).
- **Family centers are one valuable way to access and deliver services but do not exist in every community.**
- **State funding needs to be flexible to adjust to local circumstances,** e.g., provision for vulnerable families and children through locally appropriate services, recognizing differences in risk factors.

Incentives

- **Strong state policy incentives to promote parent support do not exist.** Tax and other incentives that support employees who are parents of young children (including rewarding strong policies related to family leave, childcare, offering or supporting formalized parent education or support groups, including referral to parent support as part of employee assistance programs, etc.) do not exist.

IV. PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe the state has a role to play in creating an infrastructure that assures that parents have all they need to support their children. The Early Learning Council could assure that several beginning steps are taken to set the ground work. Of the findings above not addressed below, we are hopeful that ongoing work with the ELC would continue to develop those recommendations.

INSTITUTIONALIZE PARENT SUPPORT AS NECESSARY FOR EARLY LEARNING

- **Parent Support Advisory (PSA) Committee.** Develop and form a permanent Parent Support Advisory committee to either the Department of Early Learning or the Governor
- **Fund and Expand Current Models.** Continue to fund known effective programs that the state already supports, consider expanding their scope, alignment and function to address the pillars of support.

BETTER UNDERSTAND PARENT SUPPORT NEEDS & TIE TO CHILD OUTCOMES

- **Statewide Assessment of Parent Needs.** In conjunction with the PSA, support a deeper statewide assessment (perhaps done by the state, perhaps in partnership with nonprofits, Thrive by Five, or others) of what parents need, helping to refine priorities among the possible types of support within each pillar.
- **Assess Current Programs.** Support assessing and evaluating what is currently there (both state and non-state delivered) (e.g., parent education programs, family support centers, etc.),

² This conclusion is based on the years of experience that the participants have in working with parents around the state, not statewide quantitative data. The reason that we are recommending a statewide assessment is to clearly identify statewide, in both a quantitative and qualitative way, the need for parent support services and programs.

and assess effectiveness of delivery models (cost/benefit) to ensure cultural competence, accessibility and their relationship to child outcomes.

- **Assess Barriers.** Assess barriers to and gaps in parent support programs and remove them. Examples of barriers are transportation, cost, availability (place, times), linguistic accessibility, cultural competence, awareness of the support program.
- **Research and Development.** Institutionalize parent support programming and outcomes as a research and development function at the state. Link to other processes that are looking at research and development and feedback mechanisms around child outcomes.
- **Ensure Easy Access to Information About Local Services.** Strengthen and expand the infrastructure that assures that all parents have equal access and a variety of entry points to services ('portal' for accessing services, cultural competence, wide availability) when they seek them.

DRIVE INNOVATION AND LEVERAGE SUPPORT

- **Encourage Private Sector Support of Parents.** Create business tax incentives for those companies that create work place policies that support the function of parenting.
- **Promote innovative, evidence-based best practice programs.** Develop incentives for non-profit organizations to expand or create innovative, evidence-based best practice programs that can be replicated (grant funding or other)

ON-GOING WORK ON PARENT SUPPORT

Finally, we recommend strongly that the Early Learning Council begin to work formally with this group as a Technical Advisory Committee to the process, particularly between now and before the final report is sent to Washington Learns, but also afterwards to develop specific policy priorities.

The following are key specific policy and values questions:

1. What types of parent support programs and services should be available to all families in Washington state? To what extent should the state fund such services?
2. How can the state ensure some level of uniformity in what is funded and offered but maintain flexibility in order to ensure locally-driven, culturally competent solutions?
3. How do we link parent support to child outcomes? How do we frame parent support and correlated child outcomes so that the public understands that the state's involvement is in providing certain aspects of the pillars of support, and that parents voluntarily access them? (Analogous to the need to support access to our public education or highway systems, for example)

V. LINKS TO OTHER EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND WASHINGTON LEARNS WORK

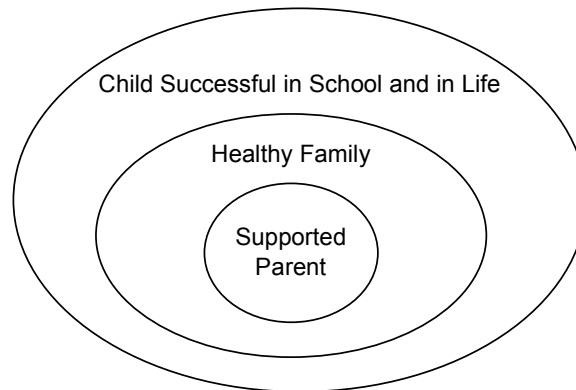
We note that in the context of Washington Learns which seeks to understand how all children can be successful in our educational systems, the following issues/questions for on-going consideration by the Council and in which we hope to engage the Council in an active dialogue.

1. Should the QRIS Community Engagement component contain requirements or “electives” for childcares/preschools to earn in the area of parent support? (For example, if a center offers parenting classes open to their clients and the community, or offers a parent coach or resource and referral to those services). Will QRIS play a role in offering technical assistance and quality ratings to parent support programs? What is the \$4.3 million currently proposed intended to cover?
2. How should formalized parent support work in B-6 link to formalized parent support at the higher K-12 grade levels?
3. What is the most effective method or methods to reach different audiences to ensure that every parent has some type of support in each of the 5 pillars (e.g., those parents not engaged in a formalized early learning setting? Those who may not want to participate in family support in a public school? Those with language and other barriers?)
4. What is the role of Thrive by Five in this area and how can we partner together to strengthen parent support in order to ensure success of children in school and in life?

VI. CONCLUSION

This effort to identify strategies and recommendations to increase support to parents is not intended be exclusive or exhaustive. The participants were limited by time constraints and enthusiastically support further work that focuses on the needs of parents when considering the success of children. All parents need support and clearly the state can play a role in increasing accessibility and limiting barriers.

APPENDIX A: PILLARS OF SUPPORT



Pillars of Parent Support

<i>Individualized, Personal Support</i>	<i>Informal Research and Education</i>	<i>Group Personal Support</i>	<i>Formalized Education</i>	<i>Information, Referral and Advice</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pre- and/or post-birth home visits ○ Mentor ○ Parenting coaching ○ Relative ○ Friend ○ Spouse/partner ○ Faith leader ○ Child care provider/preschool ○ Workplace-based mentors and coaches for parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Internet ○ Database of resources ○ Library (no cost with a range of media) ○ Health and development materials ○ Newspapers ○ TV ○ Radio ○ Family centers ○ Child care provider/preschool ○ Healthcare provider and through labor and delivery classes ○ Workplace located class, lending library and information and referral from EAP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Therapeutic support (e.g., family or parent-child therapy) ○ Support groups (e.g., family support groups) ○ Neighborhood ○ Play groups ○ Workplace groups for support, during working or lunch hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ High school (about parenting) ○ Community college (parenting classes through co-ops, other) ○ On-line classes ○ Prenatal education ○ Class for those considering parenting (hospitals, or associated with labor and delivery classes) ○ Private classes (voluntary or court-mandated) ○ Free public events ○ Child health/development mailings ○ Classes designed to meet a range of levels of parenting experiences ○ Employer-provided on-site educational classes for parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Statewide information and referral to local services and programs ○ Parenting issues hotline—with advice and support ○ Nurse hotline ○ Workplace access to community-based referral lines
Strong Health and Mental Health (insurance coverage)				
Basic Needs (food, clothing, housing stability)				
Increasing parent's time for meaningful interaction with child (e.g., work and life balance)				

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT LIST

- Alaric Bien, Chinese Information & Service Center
- Carmen Bowser, Catholic Family & Child Service (CFCS), Pasco
- Bridgett Chandler, Consultant
- Rene Doran, United Way Thurston County
- Bernie Dorsey, Conscious Fathering
- Ginny English, Within Reach
- Denise Farrand, CHILD Profile
- Nick Federici, United Way of King County
- Blanca Fernandez, Big Bend Community College
- Kate Frew, Children's Trust Foundation
- Alia Griffing, United Way of King County
- Laura Hitchcock, United Way of King County
- Karen Howell-Clark, United Way of King County
- Jean Kelly, University of Washington Center on Infant Mental Health
- Garrison Kurtz, Foundation for Early Learning
- Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society
- Paola Maranan, Children's Alliance
- Yaffa Maritz, Listening Mothers
- Roseann Martinez, Consultant
- Carol Maurer, King County Children & Family Commission
- Linda McDaniels, Parent Trust for Washington Children
- David Okimoto, United Way of King County
- Estela Ortega, El Centro de la Raza
- Sally Pritchard, United Way Spokane County
- Margie Reeves, Statewide Community Network Coalition
- Kristi Reardon, United Way Snohomish County
- Mary Helen Roberts, 21st District State Representative
- Jennifer Sass-Walton, Skagit County Health Department
- Jill Sells, Docs for Tots
- Joan Sharp, Washington Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Kip Tokuda, Seattle Family & Youth Services
- Harla Tumbleson, SOAR, helping kids reach the sky
- Kristin Wiggins, Early Care & Education Coalition
- Sherry Wong, Talaris Research Institute